

POST-OFFICE STEAM PACKETS.

RETURN to an Order of the Honourable The House of Commons,
dated 4 August 1824;—for,

COPY OF EVIDENCE of *Matthias Attwood*, Esquire, and *Thomas Brockelbank*, Esquire, before the late **COMMISSIONERS OF REVENUE INQUIRY**, relative to the **CONVEYANCE** of the **MAILS** by **STEAM PACKETS**.

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MINUTES OF EVIDENCE taken before the **COMMISSIONERS OF REVENUE INQUIRY**, at their Office in London, Thursday, 19 June 1828.

THE RIGHT HON. LORD WALLACE, IN THE CHAIR.

Matthias Attwood, Esq. M. P., and *Thomas Brockelbank*, Esquire, called in; and examined, as follows:

(To Mr. Attwood.) HAVE you any communication to make on the subject of the packets to Ostend?—We desire to complain of the opposition we have experienced by the establishment of Government packets from Margate to Ostend: our agents at Ostend, Messrs. Samuel Amour & Co., write to us, under date of the 13th of June 1828; “it is with regret we inform you that the new establishment of mails do the Company's packets some injury; for notwithstanding our departures are so arranged as to precede the mails, their average number of passengers is full twenty both ways; nor do I conceive it would be beneficial to the General Steam Navigation Company to use any extraordinary exertion in opposition to them, knowing that the captains have *cartes blanches* to take passengers at any price.” The General Steam Navigation Company has been established there three years, and after establishing the trade at a great cost, finds this opposition and reduction of passengers would render it doubtful if they can continue their boats in that station.

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What is the average number of your passengers?—The average number is about 40.

(To Mr. Brockelbank.) Taking the whole number of voyages, what has been the average number of passengers?—Forty.—(By Mr. Attwood.) The Company is desirous to propose to carry the mails to Ostend; to go twice a week for that purpose, and to go throughout the year. Their vessels go from London to Ostend in 16 hours on an average; they have performed that voyage in 13½ hours.

(To Mr. Brockelbank.) Where would you deliver them?—At Ostend.

Have you been in the habit of running to Ostend?—The vessels I am with have been running there for three years past.—(By Mr. Attwood.) The company would undertake to deliver the mail twice a week; for which they would either give in terms now to the Board, or would undertake to say that they will carry the mails at 50 per cent. reduction from what it has hitherto cost the Government, or is now costing them.

(To Mr. Brockelbank.) Do you sail from the Tower in the river?—From the Custom-House.

What is the time of sailing?—It depends on the proper time of tide for getting into Ostend. We set our tide tables as soon as we get into the harbour.

Supposing you were to sail by a tide-table, do you sail indifferently by day as well as by night?—We sail in the night, according to the tide, or early in the morning.

What time are you in getting down the river?—To Gravesend, or to the Nore? The Nore?—We get to the Nore in four hours and a half.

Have you never found a difficulty in going by night down the river?—I think in many instances it is better to go by night than by day, so long as it is a clear night; we are not exposed to so many vessels passing and repassing at that time. I have so arranged it that I have got our Hamburgh boats to go then.

And they go indifferently all hours of the night?—Yes.

At whatever time the tide serves?—Yes.

Have you had many accidents on the river?—No.

Have you had many stoppages?—No.

You have not got aground?—Once, or so; I do not know if the Ostend boat has been ever aground; the Hamburgh has been once.

Is that the only one?—I do not know of any other.

How long have they been running?—These three years past.

What are the size of the vessels?—About the same size, 250 tons, bolder measurement.

That is the size of the vessels that go to Ostend?—Yes.

Are they larger vessels that go to Rotterdam?—They are the same size, each of them has two 40-horse engines.

Have you any vessels that go to Hamburgh?—We have.

How many?—Two; we carry the letter-bags from the Post-office; the Sir William Jolliffe and the Sir Edward Bankes go every Saturday and return on Monday.

Have you any that go to Cuxhaven?—No; we go right up to Hamburgh; we go at two or three o'clock in the morning.—(By Mr. Attwood.) We have only gone once a week in the winter to Ostend, and probably should not go oftener, except by arrangement for the mail.

(To Mr. Brockelbank.) Do your vessels carry goods?—Not to Ostend; we should not carry goods if we carried the mail; we do not now; we take goods for Calais in one of our vessels, in the other, we do not. I think we could undertake to get the Calais mail from London to Calais in 10 hours; I would go at the proper time of the tide, and I should get to the Nore before daylight; if I got there by daylight, I can see the buoys; I think there is not a question upon it; I have no doubt. We have two vessels that make the passage from London to Calais in nine hours, the Harlequin and the Columbine; I have no question about it; it might happen so that the fog might stop us; but taking the weather through, there would be no difficulty in it.

What chances would there be on that voyage of being delayed from one to three or four or six hours on any given time longer than the nine hours?—Such chances as might interrupt the packets going over from Dover; and many times from Dover, when the sea is on the bars, they cannot get out; nothing could hinder us from getting out of the river.

Would the fog affect you more than it would affect a boat sailing from the coast

and crossing the Channel; on your passage down the river, should you be affected by a fog?—No doubt of it.

How often have you found a fog affect your arrival or departure?—It might be so once or twice in a year.

Not more than that?—No; I have never known that we have missed a passage without there has been a gale of wind, and we have gone into the Medway river. I do not know if we ever missed a passage from a fog.

How long have you been acquainted with steam-boats?—Ever since they began in the River Thames.

You have been acquainted with them from the first time of their sailing?—The first time in the Thames; about six or seven years.

You have never known one to be stopped by a fog?—I have never known that they have lost their passage by it; I think we could guard against that. If we undertook to carry the mails, it would be our duty to have everything ready for performing the voyage, wherever it may be; and we should certainly have the vessel stationed below, in case of a fog, so as always to get to it; supposing we were likely to have a foggy night, we should have the vessel stationed down the river, where it would not affect us, and get the mail down part of the way by land.

(To Mr. Attwood.) How would you do with respect to ice?—If there were ice in the river, which in winter there is occasionally, and the passage to the town could not in consequence be depended upon, the vessel would be stationed lower down the river, and the mail would be carried by land beyond the reach of the ice.—(By Mr. Brocklebank.) We can always get away from Gravesend.

(To Mr. Brocklebank.) Have you any boats now going to Calais?—Yes.
How many?—Two.

Do they go from London?—Yes.

Do they all go from London?—Yes.

How often do they go?—Three times a week.

Have you ever had any of them lose their passage?—I do not know that we have; we have lost some hours in waiting; I am not aware of losing a passage, except when there was a gale of wind; we have been obliged to go under the Fore-land when there has been a gale of wind.

Would the gale of wind that produced that delay, with respect to your vessel, have equally produced the delay in the vessel sailing from Dover?—I think there is no doubt of that; an easterly wind would operate very much against us, and the same easterly wind would operate against them.

You already carry the mail to Rotterdam?—To Rotterdam and Hamburgh.

What is the number of hours that each voyage takes during any given period between the receipt and the delivery of the mail?—The average number to Hamburgh is somewhere about 52.

And to Rotterdam how many?—About 27.

Do you know what is the duration of the voyage from Harwich to Helvoetsluys?—I do not know. If Government were to employ us, in winter time, it would be better for us to station a boat, in case of anything happening, so as always to have a boat to run athwart.

In case of Government coming to an arrangement with you for the purpose of carrying the mails, you would carry them by steam of course?—Certainly; we could make no certainty of it, unless it was by steam.

You take the mails regularly to Hamburgh?—Yes.

Be so good as to state under what regulations you are, as to taking the mail to Hamburgh?—They pay us so much a letter.

A ship-letter?—Yes.

Supposing the mails to Ostend and Calais were to be committed to your Company, and a contract made for the purpose, of course, with a view to the regularity of the delivery and sending, you must be under some regulations?—Government of course would bind us to our duty.

(To Mr. Attwood.) So that you should always have your boats ready to sail at a given time, and be ready to sail at a moment, so that the same regularity of proceeding should apply to your boats that were connected with the conveyance of correspondence, as at this moment is thought proper to be applied to the boats of the Post-office?—We should undertake to deliver the mails with equal regularity, and be bound by any reasonable condition or penalty to do so.

Would you act similarly with respect to Hamburgh?—Yes.

Then, in fact, these are ship-letters that you take to Hamburgh?—Yes.

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(To Mr. Brocklebank.) You are under no regulation or restriction of any kind, but you merely receive letters as a vessel going from one place to another, and receive a payment upon those letters?—Yes, and forward them as quick as we can.

Are the letters you carry very numerous?—Yes, I suppose 2,000 letters at a time; we very frequently receive 100 £ and odd, for them.

Have you carried them every voyage?—Every voyage.

You went every week through the winter?—No, but we certainly should.

What months did you go?—We generally leave off in November and begin again in March, to Hamburgh; to Ostend all the winter, and to Calais all through the winter.

Why do you leave off going to Hamburgh; on account of the want of passengers?—From the want of passengers.

You are going to Hamburgh now?—Yes.

Suppose a general agreement were made with you for the purpose of delivering letters at all the points where they are delivered on the opposite coast, could you bind yourselves then, or would you undertake to bind yourselves to sail regularly through all periods of the year?—Surely we would; you know packets cannot sail when there is a gale of wind, but we should be bound under the same restrictions as the others.

Taking Hamburgh for instance, upon what terms would it answer for you to enter into such an agreement with respect to Hamburgh, so as to force yourselves to sail twice a week?—It would want a little calculation.

Suppose you were to go as often as the Hamburgh mail goes?—It would be impossible to sit down and tell that; I am not prepared to answer the question.

Are you prepared to state what is the amount you have received monthly or annually for letters, since you have carried the mail to Hamburgh?—No; I was not aware of it, or I might have made myself master of it.

Now you carry letters also to Rotterdam?—Yes.

Could you state what is the amount you have received for carrying letters to Rotterdam?—No, I could not state that.

How far do the mail-packets that sail from Harwich to Helvoetsluis affect you in going to Rotterdam?—In point of passengers?

In every way?—I rather think they do not take so many passengers as they used.

You get all the passengers?—We get a great share of the passengers.

You go to Rotterdam in 27 hours from London?—Yes.

They do not go from Harwich to Hamburgh?—No, to Cuxhaven.

What is the distance from Cuxhaven to Hamburgh?—Fifty miles.

What number of hours does it take, five or six?—It takes about six hours; it all depends upon the tide; about six or seven hours.

Have you any idea of the average of your voyages to Hamburgh?—I think it averages from 52 to 54; I went from there myself in 50 hours; one of our vessels did it in 46, the William Jolliffe.

What is your number of hours?—I average it from 52 to 54 hours; we have made one voyage in 46 hours.

You have no vessels that go to Gottenburgh?—No, we have not. The Company would undertake to take the whole of the mails in all directions from London.

What number of vessels have you?—Seventeen.

What is the largest, and what is the smallest size you have?—The smallest size, I think, is about 130 tons, and the largest is 400 tons.

How are they distributed; what are the services in which they are engaged?—One goes to Newcastle; we have two to Hamburgh and one to Rotterdam; two to Ostend; two to Calais; two from Brighton to Dieppe.

How often do your vessels go to Calais?—Three times a week.

Does the mail go every day to Calais?—No, twice a week; we shall run for the next two months every day. Of the remainder of our vessels, there is one goes to Boulogne, two to Margate, two to Ramsgate, and we have one gone out to Portugal, and we have one down the river, which we have not stationed at present.

You do not happen to know if the letters are intended for the whole of Holland, to Amsterdam, and all other parts, which you take to Hamburgh?—I should think so, being a merchant upon 'Change myself.

If Government wish to have an engagement for this purpose, you would have no difficulty in accepting it?—None at all.

No,

Now, with respect to the other side of the island, have you any communication with Ireland?—No, we have none; but I think we would have no objection in taking the whole contract for running to the other side.

Would you be equal to that?—There is no question of it.

Have you any connexion with any of the Irish companies?—We have not.

Is there any other steam-packet company in London besides you?—Yes, the Margate Company. They have no sea-going vessels; they go up and down the River Thames.—(By Mr. Attwood.) There is another company, the Rotterdam Steam Packet Company, conducted by Messrs. Wigram's, with Bolton & Watt's engines: they have two to Rotterdam; they sail regularly; they go alternately with us to Rotterdam.

That is, you go one week and they go another?—Yes; they go to Scotland, I think. I think there is a gentleman in London connected with the vessels going between Dublin and Liverpool; it is Mr. Williams, he was in town a few days ago.—(By Mr. Brocklebank.) I think also the company I am engaged with would have no objection to take the vessels belonging to Government off their hands, and buy them: it would be a great relief to Government. I have been 20 years on the river myself, and I see no difficulty in navigating the river by night, as a practical man; a great many of the Government captains are too idle to navigate in the night. I would sooner go down with these vessels on a good clear night than I would attempt it in the day, for there are very few people whose vessels break loose at night, and you have got the whole of the thing to yourself, and you are not impeded by boats at all.—(By Mr. Attwood.) I take the navigation of the River Thames and its entrance to be one that requires much practice and a very intimate and peculiar knowledge. I understand that the captains employed by the General Steam Navigation Company are men who have been brought up in the coasting trade, fishing, or perhaps smuggling, on the Sussex and Kent coast; they must be men who are accustomed to the shoals on those coasts from their childhood. All their captains are of that description, and with this sort of captains the navigation is perfectly secure. It would be dangerous to a person merely of nautical skill, but who had not been long accustomed to these shoals.

(To Mr. Brocklebank.) Should you have power to secure efficient discipline among the crew?—We take care to give the authority entirely to the captain; we do not say take this man and the other; we look to the captain, and make him responsible for every body's acts on board.—(By Mr. Attwood.) The Company would experience difficulty from smuggling if they did not preserve discipline. Their vessels would be detained upon their voyages, and would be stopped for bringing tobacco and all sorts of things over. A perfect discipline is established.

You have never had stoppages?—No; things have been taken from the men at times, chiefly from the engineers.

That has been an act of your own displeasure?—Yes.

You have not been stopped by the revenue vessels?—The Company, keeping upon the best understanding with the Commissioners of Customs, endeavour to convince them that they are anxious to adopt every sort of regulation to prevent smuggling being carried on, and that has made them very considerate with regard to the Company's vessels. When they have found a bundle of tobacco under the coals, they might stop the vessel, but they give what facility and accommodation they can; but this imposes the necessity of using a great deal of care in the sort of men employed.

You have found, in point of fact, that your captains have been able to enforce these regulations?—Yes; the captains are a respectable set of men; it is very essential they should be so, for passengers are unwilling to sail unless they see in the captain a steady, capable and judicious person; they put confidence in the captain; and the captains of these vessels are a kind of men much to be depended upon.

(To Mr. Brocklebank.) In speaking of the discipline and the precautions that are taken with respect to smuggling, does any search take place on the part of your captain or any of your officers?—Invariably; and also by the Custom House. We have found sometimes little things suspected, and we have desired them to come on board and see; invariably so.

In passing to Rotterdam or Hamburg with the ship-letters, do you happen to know if any number of letters are clandestinely conveyed by the crew?—No, not by the crew; I have every reason to believe that they are sent in parcels, but I am not from my own knowledge.

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Would it be possible to have a prosecution against that?—We do take parcels, and if we suspect them, we take and tear them open; we have found letters and sent them to the Post-office. We carry a great number of parcels.

In a parcel of goods, where there is a letter sent explanatory of what it contains, it would be wrong to throw impediments, but when for the purpose of fraud, it is done expressly by collecting a certain number of letters, putting them into one parcel and paying for a single parcel, and so escaping the payment for letters generally, how would you prevent that?—We have found them so in some instances, and we have taken them to the Post-office. We lose the money. In one or two instances we have found it so, if even a letter is sent, we carry it to the Post-office directly.

Then it is thrown into the bag and goes with yours?—If we find it coming in any parcel we send it.

When was your Company established as a Company?—We began in 1824.

Are you incorporated?—(By Mr. Attwood.) We are not incorporated.

(To Mr. Attwood.) You are a joint-stock Company?—Yes.

Of how many do you consist?—I should judge it to be about 400 or 500; I have not the number in my mind.

It consists of a great number?—Yes.

Are they chiefly persons residing in London?—Almost all of them.

Are there any incorporated steam companies?—I do not know.

Will you tell the Commissioners, taking each vessel from 250 to 300 tons which you employ, what have you them generally built for per ton?—(By Mr. Brockelbank.) We built the Harlequin and the Columbine, which, without exception, are the two finest vessels in the kingdom. They stood the Company in 17*l.* per ton.

That is exclusive of the machinery?—Yes; the Attwood stood us in 19*l.* per ton.

Was she larger?—Not so large.

What occasioned that difference?—The Company built the two themselves; the other was built by another party, contracted for.

Do you build your own vessels now?—We have built four.

Of the 17, four have been built by yourselves?—Yes, in our own yard.

Has there prevailed that difference between the comparative cost of vessels built by you and built in the yards?—We have built seven vessels.

You have yourselves?—Yes, we have built three by contract, and four in our own yard.

You have stated that those you built by yourselves, cost 17*l.* per ton, and those you built by contract cost 19*l.* per ton, was there any reason for that which you could mention?—We got the builder's profit and we got better vessels, and for less money. I say the Government have not such vessels built.

The others you purchased?—Yes.

Is it not essentially necessary that a vessel which goes by steam should be built expressly for that purpose; that is, you cannot apply it advantageously to another? I should certainly say it could not.

Have all these vessels you have purchased, been built expressly for the purpose?—Expressly.

In what state did you buy them, new?—There are about four or five of them.

You purchased them at a very early period of their existence probably?—Yes; they were almost all new.

What service have they been built for?—Some of them that we have, went to Ireland.—(By Mr. Attwood.) The two Calais vessels, the Lord Melville and the Lord Liverpool, we purchased from Jolliffe and Banks; they employed them previously upon that station. The two Ramsgate vessels had been employed on the Ramsgate station; these four were built for these stations.

(To Mr. Attwood.) Did you purchase any for Government?—No.

What is the difference in the price per tonnage of those you have built or contracted for between the largest and the smallest?—The Brockelbank is the smallest, it would cost as much per ton as the larger vessel.—(By Mr. Brockelbank.) If you are building a large vessel and a small one in your own yard, the small vessel might not cost you more, because the parts that came out of the large vessel, would go to build the small vessel; but if you were to go to build a small vessel by herself, she would cost as much per ton as the large vessel would. I have superintended the building of seven steam-boats under my own directions.

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Have they differed much in size?—Yes, the Brockelbank is about 172 tons. What is the largest?—Three hundred and fifty.

What did she cost?—£. 17 per ton; the George the Fourth cost 19*l.* per ton.

How large is she?—Seven hundred tons.

Did you build that?—No; we built her, but by contract.

Who built her?—A man of the name of Wallace, in the river.—(By Mr. Attwood.) The George the Fourth and the Duke of York were sold to Jolliffe and Banks; they go to Lisbon and Petersburgh.

You have no vessels of your own that go to Petersburgh?—None.

(To Mr. Brockelbank.) Were those vessels that you superintended lined?—Yes.

Do you include that, when you estimate the amount at 17*l.* per ton?—What we call *futting*; that is, a skinning inside.

Were they fastened diagonally?—Yes, they were; I would rather they had not been so.

Which is most expensive?—The diagonal mode is the most expensive; but it is not the best adapted, for it soon gets loose; for this very reason, the wood shrinks up, and then you may shove your fingers in between the diagonal wood, and then all the fastenings are gone; I do not believe the diagonal system is any way so good to a vessel, and I will tell you why, I do not find any of the first-rate builders attempt to do it; they certainly could do it cheaper than what they could do it the other way, for this very reason, they must have long timber to make long planks, and they must have short timber to make short planks, and long timber is of more value. I find neither Barnard nor the first-rate builders do it in steam-boats; it is quite wrong entirely; the engine-room soon gets dried up, it loses all its hold; I believe the Liverpool is built in that way; I could pull out the diagonal pieces with my fingers.

What is the power of the boats that go to Ostend and Hamburg?—The one to Hamburg has two 40-horse engines; the William Jolliffe has two 50-horse engines; the Attwood, two 40-horse engines, to Rotterdam; the Liverpool has two 40-horse engines to Ostend.

Are they not very small powers?—It depends entirely how the vessel is built; a great deal depends as to the vessel; there is a wrong notion in steam-boats by giving too much hold of the water. The Harlequin and Columbine, belonging to Government, were built by Wigram's people; they have only two 40-horse engines in each of them.

Should you have any objection to give an account of the steam vessels that you have; the service in which they are employed; their tonnage and their powers?—Certainly not.

Whose engines do you use?—We have the Butterly Company's engines, of Derby.

What are the names of the persons?—Wright and Jessop; they are considered equal to Bolton and Watt; we do more execution with our 40-horse engines than some do with their 50.

(To Mr. Brockelbank.) Are you able to say which have stood best?—I contracted for the engines in the Royal Sovereign myself, and also the City of London; and their engines are equally good as when they were first put in, about six or eight years ago.

You have engineers regularly appointed to each vessel?—Yes.

Is it the same as to Government vessels?—Yes, an engineer and two firemen; if we are going on a foreign station we must make it different; they are obliged to take watch and watch.

What number of persons have you on board; what is the establishment for each steam vessel?—There is the captain, the mate, the second mate; it is in a vessel of 40-horse engines; the captain, the mate, the carpenter, and four men and a boy; the engineer and firemen are distinct altogether; that is, going to Hamburg; if going a shorter voyage, we should have two men less.

*Matthias Attwood.
Thomas Brockelbank.*